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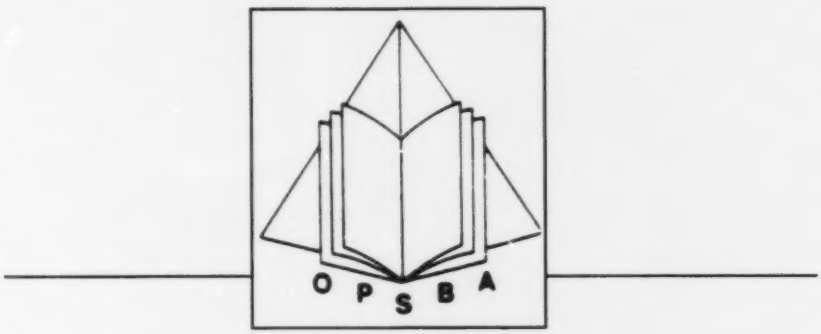

MEMBER BOARD RESPONSES

TO

"A BLUEPRINT FOR REACHING OUT"

- SUMMARY OF RESPONSES
- RECOMMENDATION FOR A PROVINCIAL COMMUNICATION SERVICE AND SERVICE COSTING

APRIL, 1990

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REVIEW OF MEMBER BOARD RESPONSES

General Reactions

A total of 60 boards responded to the communications package sent to boards in early November, 1989. Forty seven boards indicated that they would like to be involved in a provincial communications program. In addition, many of these boards provided a number of suggestions and alternatives for consideration.

A number of boards welcomed the communications package. Some on the basis of its specific suggestions and others on the basis that the package acted as a catalyst for Member Boards to discuss and debate the kind of role the Association should and can have with respect to meeting the local and provincial communications needs of boards.

Thirteen Member Boards expressed no further interest in the communications ideas for a number of reasons. Some could not see an Association role in meeting local board needs. Others felt that they were already undertaking the same or similar programs. A few boards indicated that they simply did not feel the specific components of the package were effective at the local level.

A chief concern of all responding boards was that a communications program and its specific services must be applicable to local circumstances. Many boards favour "generic" services and information techniques that could be easily manipulated to local issues and local communications requirements.

Specific Reactions to Different Components

Tax Bill Inserts

Boards overwhelmingly favoured the concept of tax bill inserts over all other components touched on the Association's package. Based on the responses some boards will be proceeding with this suggestion on their own regardless of future Association involvement. Only a small number of Member Boards now

include a school board tax insert in the municipal tax bill envelope. While many boards have considered the idea before, education tax increases in 1988, 1989, and the likelihood of double digit tax increases in 1990 have made this specific suggestion even more attractive. Boards are looking seriously at ways to inform all taxpayers about the number of factors, mostly related to provincial government initiatives, that have and continue to drive up local mill rates.

The tax bill insert idea is, however, highly complicated. The attractiveness of the Association's role in this proposal is the cost-effectiveness of producing the materials. All boards recognized this advantage. However, several local board factors relating to tax bill inserts have a significant effect on the Association's ability to coordinate this project. They include, but are not limited to:

(a) the tax insert must relate to local board circumstances, issues and financial picture.

(b) many boards deal with multiple municipalities, each frequently having different specifications relating to insert dimensions and paper weight.

(c) a number of municipalities want to have some control over the actual insert copy, particularly the political tone and the issues.

(d) some municipalities have, in the past, objected to a school board insert.

These problems could be overcome with time. For the foreseeable future however, boards interested in this idea would not find significant costs savings if the Association prepares tax bill inserts in, say, 20-30 different dimensions, all with different contents. In their responses boards recognized this problem.

Many boards commented that a key role for the Association would be to prepare different samples of tax inserts, covering different issues. Boards could then "re-work" the copy inserting local financial data and commentary.

Newspaper Inserts/Columns

Boards with communication/information staff responded that they already have sound strategies for positioning their board's profile in local daily and weekly newspapers. These boards listed (some documented) effective media relations, including the promotion of "positive story angles" or regular "corporate" board news releases. Almost all boards felt that, effective and informative material for local newspapers had to deal with educational issues in a local context, although stories and news angles dealing with provincial education trends would be a welcomed service.

Boards without communications staff saw a more practical need for "generic" news releases, general commentary, research and opinion copy on trends in education in which boards would insert local examples and relevant information. In addition, these boards indicated that material covering fast-breaking issues in education, including Ministerial statements and government announcements relating to education and school boards, would constitute a valuable service. Some board communications staff indicated that they would also find such information helpful in preparing board newsletters, news releases, annual or semi-annual tabloids and other board publications.

Radio Commentary

Although some boards do use radio commercials and public service commentary there exist a debate about the costs of radio air and the perception that radio advertising creates in the mind of the public. Some boards feel that educational content becomes too "commercialized" through radio advertising. Other boards feel that radio advertising does more to raise public concerns about school board spending on radio advertisement than it does on the content of the radio message. Other boards do not share these concerns and have used paid commercial radio to promote particular programs and services of their school system.

Boards situated in larger urban centres questioned whether their local radio stations would carry radio public service announcements or commentary.

Boards in smaller communities were undecided about this. Research indicates that radio stations are split as to their policy for airing public service announcements and the time allocated for such announcements. The Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation has developed a very complete package of public service commentaries which is being aired on some radio stations. Some board respondents mentioned hearing these radio spots.

In suggesting this particular communications approach the Association did not rule out the possibility that some radio time may have to be purchased for general public education promotional messages. In fact, inherent in the development of all the different communications components, was the wise recognition that different strategies will work in different locations. In Metropolitan Toronto, radio time has been purchased by the Metro boards over the last three years. In such a competitive and expensive radio market, it is unlikely that OPSBA sponsored radio commentary would be aired. Moreover, it would not be appropriate to duplicate a service already provided and paid for by a Member Board. In other smaller Ontario communities where the board(s) are not utilizing radio, the costs of radio in relation to the number of people radio reaches, makes paid radio a very attractive and effective communications tool.

Cable Television Programs

Many Member Board respondents were interested in this approach, but most felt that few people in their communities watch cable television. Many boards reported that only some parts of the board's jurisdiction have access to cable television. Other board felt that cable television programs had to relate to local issues, topics and personalities and doubted whether a "provincial" cable program would be of interest to local cable outlets and viewers.

These observations have merit within our current understanding of the mandate and programming of cable television. However, cable television is changing for two basic reasons -- the desire for top quality programming and visually appealing production in order to stay competitive with the commercial television market.

Clearly, local cable programming will never drift far away from the parameters of the communities it serves and local personalities will always be a fixture. But education, for example, is a local issue and topic. The Association's concept of a provincial cable production was not to replace local initiatives, but to supplement and encourage them.

The Association envisaged a series of 10-20 minute, high quality cable productions. These programs would become the backdrop for local trustees or other local education personalities to build in local issues, concerns and implications. For example, a program on education finance and the provincial government's contribution to public education would be followed by a reaction group of local trustees. Viewers in all regions would see the same program or video, but the final 10-15 minutes would be local trustees/staff/parents/teachers discussing the issues raised in the video.

Cable television is one of the fastest growing enterprises in the telecommunications field. Currently, it is an inexpensive form of television that can only increase in popularity.

Four Member Board respondents would seriously consider using a provincial cable production in the manner outlined above. Ten boards indicated they would use 5-10 minute "video clips" on provincial education issues for use in local Member Board video productions or as discussion pieces.

However, to be cost effective for Member Boards, a minimum of twenty boards would be required to subscribe to this particular service.

ISSUES/TOPICS THAT SHOULD BE COVERED

The official response form asked Member Boards to list the kinds of issues or topics that should be covered in the different communications vehicles. The following list summarizes the responses.

- *Education financing and how it works.*

- *The impact of Ministry mandated programs on local board budgets.*
- *Provincial issues in education.*
- *Positive developments and trends in public education.*
- *Legislative issues and explanations of government education legislation.*
- *Cooperative education, continuing education and life long learning.*
- *Student and school based information.*
- *The role of school trustees.*
- *The management role of school boards.*

FINANCING A COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

The majority of Member Board respondents favoured a "fee for service" arrangement. In other words, boards that participated in the communications program would pay a fee to cover the costs. Some boards indicated they would like the option to "buy in" to certain aspects of the program.

Almost all boards rejected a financing scheme that would increase base membership fees.

SUMMARY

Based on the responses, the majority of Member Boards have expressed the view that their provincial association can and should have a role to play in providing specific communications services. The communications services however should not be direct to the public, but provided to the boards for use at the board's discretion or in any way the board sees fit.

Boards' communications requirements and needs vary greatly both within regions and among regions. Boards with communications staff that responded favourably to the communications suggestions would like "generic" communications services to supplement local communications programs and initiatives. Boards without such staff tended to favour obtaining a more finished communications product.

CURRENT ASSOCIATION COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Before turning to recommendations that reflect the expressed requirements and needs of Member Boards, it is important to review current Association communications functions and services. The kind and range of communications services recommended cannot be undertaken within the resources now allocated by the Association to communications and information services. This point must be clearly understood.

Through the participation of many Association staff, a number of communications and information services are provided to Member Boards. These services are managed and coordinated by the Association's Communications Department. This department has three staff, a Director, Publications Coordinator and an Administrative Assistant, Communications. While these staff have primary responsibility for communications, they also have various responsibilities in other services and functions of the Association. Established services include:

- *weekly Fast Reports*
- *Education Today magazine*
- *Periodic editions of OPSBA News and Views*
- *Association news releases*
- *General media relations*

- *General Association promotion*

- *word processing, desk-top publishing, layout and design of the above, and all major Association position papers, briefs and submissions and special publications such as the Report to Membership, Resource Publications, Awards program and Annual Report.*

Together, these services fully utilize the existing communications staff and the financial resources available for communications and information services to Member Boards.

Further direct communications services for Member Boards will require the use of outside consulting services or an increase in Association staff and other resources.

A PROVINCIAL COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE PLAN

In developing a provincial communications package for Member Boards, we have had to read and re-read the official responses by Member Boards several times. We then proceeded to blend the reactions from boards to the specific suggestions contained in "Blueprint" to a number of new and alternate suggestions we received through the consultation process. This helped us create a final set of very specific communications services.

We then proceeded to cost each component of the communications package, and, also determine the participation fee for a Member Board. There are five main assumptions built into the costing process.

1. There must be a minimum of 30 Member Boards participating in the program in order for the service to be affordable.

2. The program be suited for boards with and without communications staff. This means that some of the communications services must be "generic", while other services must be in the form of a finished product.

3. That a professional consulting company with a solid reputation and proven track record of service in the public education sector undertake to provide these services.

4. That all services, except special consultations, shall be managed and coordinated through the Association centrally and passed on to Member Boards. In other words, the Association will be the "client" on behalf of the participating boards. There will not be 30 or more clients.

5. Most important, participating boards will not be able to "pick and choose" among the different components. The communications plan is a "packaged service", and its costing is based heavily on this assumption.

THE COMMUNICATIONS PACKAGE AND ITS COMPONENTS

Generic News Releases, Columns, Articles and Speeches

1. News Releases

Participating boards would receive timely news releases covering provincial announcements, Ministerial statements, and other fast breaking developments in education. The news releases would contain the "facts" relating to the issue/announcement and many relevant trends and suggestions or local comments. Boards would add their own quotes and local data/information in preparation for release to their local media.

2. Generating "Good News"

Participating boards would receive monthly news releases on positive developments in public education. Relevant local information and trends could be added for final release to local media.

3. Articles, Columns and Commentary

Participating boards would receive a monthly article/column and/or commentary on developments or issues in education. Boards could use this material under any by-line, or for many other purposes including, columns for local newspapers, board newsletters or other board publications.

4. Speeches

Participating boards would receive two speeches per year. One relating to the funding of public education which would be distributed during the spring to coincide with the setting of local board budgets, the release of the General Legislative Grant Regulations and the release of the Provincial Budget. The other speech would be released at the beginning of the school year.

Camera-Ready Artwork

5. Advertisements

Participating boards would receive advertisements relating to four key school events to be developed later. (Examples include Kindergarten enrolment, graduation, school opening and adult education.) The advertisements would be in the form of camera-ready artwork, but school boards could place their own logo or board identifier on the material.

6. Flyer

Participating boards would receive camera-ready artwork for a four-page, four colour or black and white flyer that could be inserted in local newspapers, distributed to parents and teachers or sent home with children. The materials would be sent to boards in July to allow boards time to print the materials in the desired quantity and arrange for distribution in September.

Professional Assistance

7. Communications/Media Tips

Participating boards would receive a two-page newsletter, six times per year, covering ideas and suggestions for general communications, media relations and local school promotion and marketing. The ideas would have two sources: ideas now operational in school boards that have proven successful; and new and innovative approaches and developments in the communications/school marketing field. These "tips" will have a local focus for relevancy and easier implementation.

8. Communications Training

Participating boards would have the opportunity to attend a communications training session to be held annually. Those attending from participating boards would not pay a registration fee, but would be responsible for transportation and accommodation, if necessary.

9. Telephone Hotline

Participating boards would have telephone access to professional advice on any aspect of the communications program listed above, including media relations, implementation problems or any other aspect of the communications program that requires "trouble shooting".

10. Consultations

Consultations for additional, specialized or customized service or any services above and beyond the parameters of the communication program will be made available to participating boards. A consultation fee would apply.

COSTING

(Based on participation by 30 Member Boards)

News Releases (Approximately 10 per year)	$11,500
Generating "Good News" (12 per year)	$15,000
Articles, Columns and Commentary (12 per year)	$12,000
Speeches (2 per year)	$ 5,000
Advertisements (4 per year)	$10,000
Flyer (Once per year)	$10,000
Communications/Media Tips (6 issues per year)	$10,000
Communications Training (One session per year)	$15,000
Telephone Hotline	$12,000
Total	**$100,000**
Contingency	$11,000
GRAND TOTAL	**$111,000**
Cost per Participating Board **(minimum 30 participating boards)** **(45 participating boards)**	 **$3,700** **$2,466**

PACKAGING

All communications services in this program will be packaged and labelled under a designated service name so participating boards will be able to clearly distinguish all materials they receive.

CONSULTATION SCHEDULE

1. This report is to be submitted to the Association's Operations Committee on April 27th.

2. Forwarded to the Association's Board of Directors for approval on June 7th.

3. Forwarded to all Member Boards August 15th. Member Boards will have until October 1st to review the project and decide on participation. Should 30 or more boards agree to participate, they will be billed for the participation fee (total costs divided by number of participating boards, minimum of 30 boards). The communications services will come into effect on January 7th, 1991.

4. Participating Member Boards will be billed in October, every year thereafter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Operations Committee approve the concept, services, costing and the consultation schedule above as presented and recommend approval of the same to the Board of Directors.

2. That during the time between the approval by the Operations Committee and the Board of Directors, copies of this report be forwarded to existing board communications staff for consultation and refinement, where applicable and appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

Ross Parry
Director of Communications

Penny Moss
Executive Director